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TAGS: PREL SG GA

SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: ONGOING TENSIONS WITH SENEGAL OVER THE CASAMANCE

REF: A. 06 BANJUL 722

1B. 06 BANJUL 761

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

SENEGALESE AMBASSADOR'S CONCERN

11. (C) On January 3, Senegalese Ambassador Mamadou Fall called on Ambassador to register concern over what he portrayed as the GOTG's continued meddling in the Casamance dossier. Fall claimed that three leading MFDC figures cooperating in GOS peace efforts -- Alexandre Djibba, Magne Dieme, and Kamoughe Diatta -- remained in detention here. Fall said Dieme had already spent several months in the Gambians' custody, while the other two had been picked up about a month and a half ago. According to Fall, Gambian authorities, rebuffing GOS demands for the trio's release, had so far given no clear explanation for their detention and had simply asserted that they were "thugs."

DAKAR'S PATIENCE WEARING THIN

12. (C) Senegalese Ambassador Fall said Dakar's patience over the detentions was wearing thin and expressed exasperation over the GOTG's failure to grant his repeated requests of late to meet with Gambian President Yahya Jammeh so as to underscore the depth of GOS frustration. Speaking of Senegal's "far greater power than The Gambia's," Fall warned of possible GOS "retaliation" if Gambian authorities seemed intent on keeping the three MFDC figures in detention indefinitely. He went on to note the substantial damage caused the Gambian economy by the August/October 2005 closure of the Sengalese border with The Gambia. (NOTE: Among the hardships caused by the border closure, it brought to a halt The Gambia's vital re-export trade in the sub-region and resulted in a substantial loss of customs revenue to the GOTG. END NOTE) Fall suggested that the threat of another closure might be among the options considered by the Senegalese if the unhelpful Gambian posture on the Casamance persisted. However, when Ambassador urged GOS restraint and efforts with the GOTG to overcome the current strains through peaceful dialog, Fall gave assurances that Dakar at present was not considering any "drastic moves" such as border closure.

APPEAL FOR U.S. PRESSURE

13. (C) Fall stated that Senegal needed the help "of the donor community" in pressing the GOTG for greater cooperation on the Casamance and asked specifically for U.S. pressure on the Gambians. He asked that we not only approach the GOTG directly on the issue but also work through the International Monetary Fund by opposing implementation of the new PRGF

currently under consideration for The Gambia (ref a). Ambassador responded that he could make no commitments on this score and again urged efforts by the two parties to reach a peaceful, diplomatic resolution of the current strains.

COMMENT

¶4. (C) As previously reported (ref b), we were reliably told that Wade had absented himself from Jammeh's December 15 inauguration ceremony because of displeasure over the GOTG's Casamance posture. Judging from Fall's presentation, the Senegalese/Gambian strains have, if anything, intensified in the intervening weeks. While the Senegalese Ambassador indicated that Dakar remained committed to a diplomatic solution, he also made clear that Senegalese patience was not infinite and that ratcheting up the pressure on the GOTG could become necessary at some point. We continue to believe that Jammeh's apparent mischief-making on the Casamance issue stems at least in part from ongoing suspicions of a Senegalese hand in the abortive coup plot in March 2006 and of harboring its ringleader, former CHOD Ndure Cham. END

COMMENT.
STAFFORD